

# The Medical Waste Reporter



Announcements for Wisconsin's Medical Waste Generators

Reporting year 2000

January 2001

## Medical Waste Pubs On-line

DNR has put most of its medical waste publications on its Internet web site. You can access these publications by pointing your web browser to <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us> and going to the Waste Management Program pages, where you may click on menu items "medical waste" and "publications".

Most publications are in a downloadable (pdf) format that requires you to use an "Adobe Acrobat reader." Access to the free Adobe software is available on DNR's web site.

## Annual Report Form Revised

DNR has revised the infectious waste annual report form to make it easier for you to fill out and easier for DNR to follow-up with you if your report is incomplete. If you have any questions about how to fill out the form, consult the revised instructions or contact the DNR Medical Waste Coordinator, Barb Derflinger. (See page 2 for contact information.)

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## Medical Mercury Workshops

A medical mercury workshop was held November 2, 2000, in Superior to educate about 35 health care facility staff attendees (doctors, nurses, purchasers, maintenance staff and veterinarians) about mercury reduction for their facilities. The workshop also included reduction education for dioxins, electronics and medical waste in general.

**The next medical mercury workshop will be held in Green Bay at St. Mary's Hospital on Wednesday, March 21, 2001.**

The next workshop, similar to the one described above, will be open to all healthcare facilities in

the Fox Valley region. If interested, contact Shane Brooks, Appleton, at (920) 832-5945 or Dan Busch, Green Bay, at (920) 438-1039.

## Mercury Recycling Program Extended Through 2001

The Mercury Recycling program, which allows medical facilities and others to recycle mercury and mercury-containing products and equipment for free or at a low cost, has been extended to December 31, 2001. The program has been running since September 1999.

Eight Wisconsin communities (Appleton, Green Bay, Kenosha, Madison, Marinette, the Milwaukee Metro Sewerage District, Racine and Superior) are participating in the program and three more (Ashland, Eau Claire, and LaCrosse) are joining the campaign. Free recycling may not be available in the three new communities.

So far over 1,500 pounds of mercury have been collected in this program: 750 pounds elemental mercury, 75 pounds mercury amalgam, 7,500 thermometers, 450 switches, 185 thermostats,

Continued on next page→

and 212 pounds miscellaneous. (Not all items were counted or weighed, and some were categorized differently at each collection point.)

Medical facilities have contributed over 300 pounds of mercury to this collection.

For information about mercury reduction and recycling or about how your community might start a mercury collection program, contact Randy Case of the DNR (see contact box below).

## Dental Amalgam Recycling

The Wisconsin Dental Association (WDA) and the DNR have created an amalgam recycling guide for Wisconsin dentists. This guide:

- describes mercury's impacts on the environment and human health,
- lists types of amalgam wastes,
- gives instructions for recycling amalgam, and
- lists recycling vendors around the nation.

WDA has distributed the guide to all its member dentists. Limited quantities for others are available from Mara Brooks at the Wisconsin Dental Association at (608) 250-3442.

## Mercury Thermometer Bans

Many nation-wide retail stores have banned the sale of mercury thermometers, including K-Mart, Walgreens, Wal-Mart, Target, Albertsons and Toys-R-Us. Dane County (surrounds Madison) recently banned the sales and several Wisconsin communities are considering doing the same.

### HOW TO CONTACT DNR STAFF:

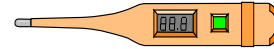
#### *Medical waste questions:*

Barb Derflinger, Medical Waste Coordinator  
Phone: (608) 267-3548 Fax: (608) 267-2768  
Email: medwaste@dnr.state.wi.us  
Address: DNR WA/3, PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921

#### *Mercury questions:*

Randy Case, Health Care Sector Specialist  
Phone: (608) 267-7639 Fax: (608) 267-0496  
Email: casec@dnr.state.wi.us  
Address: DNR CO/8, PO Box 7921  
Madison, WI 53707-7921

## Want to Hold A Mercury Thermometer Exchange?



Several Wisconsin communities and many businesses sponsor such exchanges, many at Clean Sweeps or other hazardous waste collection events.

You could sponsor one for the public, for your patients or for your staff. Here's how:

- When promoting the exchange, tell the public to bring their intact thermometers in a sealed plastic container.
- Do not accept broken thermometers, which must be managed as a hazardous waste and should go directly to a Clean Sweep site or hazardous waste facility.
- Have a mercury spill kit at the collection site.
- Find a large plastic collection container ("your container") with a securable lid for people to place their thermometers in.
- Label your container "Wisconsin-specific Universal Waste--Other Sealed Mercury-containing Devices".
- Either wrap each thermometer in bubble wrap or pack your container with vermiculite.
- Store your container no more than one year.
- Before transporting your container to a recycling facility or Clean Sweep site, tightly secure its lid and, if possible, double-bag it.
- If the mercury is transported out-of-state, contact those states regarding their rules.
- Contact the Federal Dept. of Transportation (DOT) at (608) 829-7530 regarding weight limits for air and water transportation.
- Although highway transport of mercury has no specific weight limits, each package must contain less than one pound of mercury (about 900 thermometers, assuming 0.5 g Hg per thermometer) or be subject to more stringent DOT requirements.

The above "best management practices" are for intact thermometers, which may be managed according to Wisconsin universal waste rules for thermostats in ch. NR 690, Wis. Adm. Code.

For more ideas, see "How to Plan and Hold a Mercury Thermometer Exchange", put out by Health Care Without Harm at [www.noharm.org/](http://www.noharm.org/).

## Inspect and Replace Your Mercury Manometers Now

Does your medical facility have mercury blood pressure manometers? Want to get rid of them but just can't justify the cost of replacing them? Here are four things to consider!

**Accuracy.** Mercury manometers have long been considered the most accurate device to measure blood pressure. However, did you know their accuracy can be effected by the way they are used? Accuracy of readings can vary by the height of the mercury column above or below the level of the heart and by the angle at which the meniscus of the column is viewed.<sup>1</sup> Accuracy may also change through time as the mercury becomes contaminated with dust.

Aneroid (dial) type units, on the other hand, are not affected by the height of the unit, by the viewing angle or by dust. Manufacturers often guarantee today's aneroid manometers to be accurate for life, as long as the gauge needle is within the calibration marks.

Inspect your mercury manometers. Does the meniscus of each manometer read exactly zero? How many inaccurately read above zero?

**Risk of mercury spills.** Face it. A mercury spill would be hazardous to your staff and patients. It might temporarily shut down part or all of your facility. And each clean-up could cost you thousands of dollars. Mercury from blood pressure units tends to splatter over a large area and must be cleaned up by a hazardous waste company. Clean-up typically includes disposal of any equipment contaminated with mercury; tearing up the carpeting; removing any visible mercury with a mercury vacuum; washing down the entire area, and collecting all wash water for disposal as hazardous waste.

Inspect your manometers again. How many of them have cracked hoses or inflation bulbs? Do they also have a rubber seal that keeps the mercury from leaking out of the glass column? This seal cannot be inspected without taking the unit apart. Cracks in tubes or inflation bulbs suggest that the rubber seal may also be cracked. How many spills can you afford?

**Latex.** In addition to mercury, mercury blood pressure units may use latex rubber bulbs, tubing, and cuffs. Changing to new non-latex units would reduce the potential latex reactions for patients and staff using your manometers.

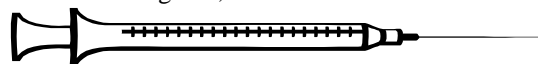
**Disposal costs (savings).** Disposal of mercury manometers, which must be managed as hazardous waste, costs \$50 or more per unit. Participation in the Wisconsin Mercury Recycling program (only offered through 2001) may greatly reduce disposal costs. Or, your vendor may agree to exchange mercury manometers for new ones.

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So there you have it. Four great reasons to inspect and replace your mercury manometers now. Consider it an investment in the health of your staff and patients.

*Many thanks to Bruce Cunha of the Marshfield Clinics for sharing this information and for gathering these references:*

1. "Common Problems In Measuring Blood Pressure And Recommendations For Avoiding Them." Reprinted from the American Heart Association, "Human Blood Pressure Determination." [www.trimlinmed.com/html/common\\_mistakes.html](http://www.trimlinmed.com/html/common_mistakes.html)
2. "Recommended Techniques For Blood Pressure Measurement." British hypertension Society. [www.hyp.ac.uk/bhsinfor/techniques.html](http://www.hyp.ac.uk/bhsinfor/techniques.html)
3. "Validation Of The Welch Allyn Maxi-Stabil Aneroid." King's College, University of London, London England, Dec. 1998.



## Safer Needles: Are They "Infectious Waste"?

Now that Federal law requires the use of safer devices for administering medications, are the safer needles "infectious waste" or not?

It depends on the device. If the device has a needle which retracts or is sheathed, it IS infectious waste under Wisconsin's rules (ch. NR 526). Remember, "once a needle, always a needle." If the device has NO needle and it contains no drippable amounts of blood or body fluids, it is NOT infectious waste and may be discarded as solid waste, or, if possible, recycled.

## Medicaid Reimbursements For Sharps Containers

Sharps containers are a reimbursable expense under Medicaid. Transportation, treatment and disposal of full containers are not reimbursable expenses. Medicaid will pay for disposable containers, a category which includes sharps containers, as follows:

- W1226 1 gallon 2 per month
- W1227 1 quart 2 per month
- W1228 2 quart 2 per month
- W1229 2 gallon 1 per month
- W1230 8 gallon 1 per month

The code numbers in the first column are taken from the Wisconsin Medicaid Index of Disposable Medical Supplies. Questions about Medicaid reimbursements can be directed to EDS Provider Services at (800) 947-9627 or (608) 221-

## Problem Wastes: Drug Samples

An anonymous Wisconsin clinic, recently changed its policy on drug samples. Drug representatives who leave medication samples are now required to pick up their outdated ones.

"Disposal of medication samples was becoming a significant expense," explained the clinic's waste manager Mike (not his real name). "Once our staff quit putting outdated medications in sharps containers and red bags, the volume of material started to become significant."

State hazardous waste rules require the generator to determine whether or not each waste medication is a "hazardous waste". Clinic administrators were soon convinced of what a monumental task it would be to sort through all the outdated drug samples.

Drug representatives claimed that they could not take back the medications once they were signed for. Mike responded, "If that is so, they need to arrange to have the samples shipped out as hazardous waste at their cost."

The clinic's doctors were not happy either. "The doctors did not understand why something they could prescribe for an individual was a hazardous waste when it was outdated," Mike said. "I had to present Hazardous Waste 101 to them to get them

to understand the terminology of waste and hazardous waste."

For more information about determining whether or not a waste is "hazardous waste," contact your local DNR hazardous waste specialist.

## NEW RESOURCES

**Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E)** is a program to create pollution prevention strategies for hospitals. Visit [www.h2e-online](http://www.h2e-online) for the American Hospital Association/ USEPA's Memorandum of Understanding for eliminating mercury, the **Comprehensive Plan for Virtual Mercury Elimination in Hospitals** and the **Guide to Environmentally-Preferable Purchasing**.

**Reducing Mercury Use in Health Care/ Promoting a Healthier Environment: A How-to Manual** by the Monroe County (New York) Department of Health, 1999. Contact: Carole Beale, 111 Westfield Road, PO Box 92832, Rochester, NY 14692. Phone: (716) 292-3935. Email: [cbeal@rochester.lib.ny.us](mailto:cbeal@rochester.lib.ny.us) On-line: <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/bns/merchealth/>

DNR's **References: Health Care and Medical Waste** (PUBL WA-290-00) has been revised to list up-to-date information sources for reducing medical waste and mercury. Contact Barb Derflinger (see page 2) for a copy, or download it from DNR's website.

## Mercury Reduction Honor Roll

So many medical facilities have reduced or eliminated the use of mercury that we no longer have room to recognize you individually here. Please accept our congratulations and continue to tell us about your progress under Line P of your infectious waste annual report(s).

These announcements were prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, for distribution with publication PUBL-WA-809-00 (infectious waste annual report form packet) in January 2001. Comments and questions can be directed to Barb Derflinger, DNR Medical Waste Coordinator (see contact box on page 2)